

Higher Ed for Higher Standards

Call to Action for Postsecondary Leaders

Background

Raising academic standards in our elementary and secondary schools is essential if we are to increase the preparation of our nation's young people for postsecondary education and training opportunities after high school. The Common Core State Standards are among the most promising and prominent efforts to date to help achieve this goal. The Common Core standards set expectations appropriately high: Students who meet the standards at each grade level should be prepared to graduate high school with literacy, communication and mathematics skills necessary for first-year courses in college and entry-level positions in today's economy. Support among K–12 educators for the new standards is strong, but public awareness is relatively low and a lack of a clear understanding is undermining legislative support for the standards and aligned assessments in a number of states. A new coalition of postsecondary leaders is stepping forward to elevate the higher education voice in support of the Common Core standards and to keep the conversation grounded in student preparation and success.

Importance of the Higher Education Voice

Higher education leaders at the campus, system and state levels can and should play an active role in the future of the Common Core standards. Higher education systems will be direct beneficiaries when students arrive on college campuses better prepared, which will reduce remediation rates and improve completion rates. Higher education voices must be heard when state policymakers make decisions about the standards and measures used to assess student performance.

Strategy

The National Association of System Heads, The State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, The Association of Governing Boards, The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, and The American Association of State Colleges and Universities is joining a coalition of postsecondary leaders called Higher Ed for Higher Standards, premised on three principles and a three-step "action plan" for supporting the Common Core standards and aligned assessments. The goal of this Call to Action is to create a unified message among higher education leaders in support of the principles and grow the list of supporters over time.

Statement of Principles

1. *Every state should insist on K-12 academic standards that adequately prepare students for college and careers so that every young person has the opportunity to pursue postsecondary education, or quality training and careers, after high school. The Common Core State Standards were developed by states to serve this goal and represent a significant improvement over most states' previous standards.*
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2. *New assessments aligned to the Common Core standards are equally critical. States' current high school tests do not adequately measure whether students have mastered the new, higher standards. More sophisticated assessment instruments are necessary to provide better feedback to teachers, parents and students, and offer more meaningful information to colleges on students' postsecondary preparation.*
3. *Higher education has a clear and compelling stake in this debate. Effective implementation of the Common Core standards and aligned assessments is an important step toward improving college readiness, reducing remediation rates and improving completion rates in our two- and four-year institutions and among our job-training programs.*

We stand with our K-12 colleagues and support their efforts to raise standards. We encourage state policymakers to stay the course on these important reforms. Rolling back or lowering standards would be a disservice to our students and K-12 schools, and to our colleges and universities.

Three-Step Action Plan: Add your name to the growing list of higher education leaders who agree with these principles and are willing to make their voices heard in support of the Common Core standards and aligned assessments. Take these simple steps:

1. ***Sign the Statement of Principles online.*** Signing allows Higher Ed for Higher Standards to add your name to a public list in favor of the Common Core standards and aligned assessments.
2. ***Contact state policymakers to express support.*** Participate actively in the public discourse and urge your state policymakers to “stay the course” on the Common Core standards and aligned assessments.
3. ***Consider writing an op-ed column and getting the message out through social media.*** Help explain why higher education supports efforts like Common Core that have the potential to dramatically improve the preparation of our young people for postsecondary opportunities after high school.

Education Strategy Group is leading this effort with support from the Collaborative for Student Success, created by a group of philanthropic partners committed to college-and-career-ready standards for all students. For more information, please contact: Matt Gandal (mgandal@edstrategy.org) or Shannon Gilkey (sgilkey@edstrategy.org)